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# beyond one voice: the challenge and complexity of representation for local government and the third sector



part of the **LGA group**

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# foreword

Recent government policy has highlighted the importance of participation and engagement and local authorities are now seen as pivotal to the involvement of local citizens in civic life. Alongside this, there is an expectation that local government and the third sector will work together, both to improve public services and to foster the wider development of civil society.

This crucial relationship between the sectors requires effective arrangements for views to be collected and communicated. However, in practice, the challenge of 'representation' in the third sector continues to vex and confound practitioners. Local authorities advocate streamlined arrangements, with many encouraging local organisations to 'speak with one voice'. Third sector organisations counter this with arguments in favour of more pluralist arrangements which can accommodate the diversity and difference of the sector and the many voices that need to be heard. Neither side of this debate has the magic solution to an area which is complex and contested.

As part of the ongoing partnership between the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR), we set out to shed a little light on the organisation and practice of representation. We wanted to move beyond checklists and toolkits to consider the different ways in which local practitioners, across both the governmental and third sectors, were tackling the challenge of representation. The fruits of that study are set out in this report. We do not provide definitive answers or solutions; we have tried hard to avoid the trap of over-simplifying a complicated topic.

We are extremely grateful to the individuals from the ten representation structures covered in this report who participated so constructively and openly in this research. Their experiences and ideas confirm that, despite its complexity and the challenges of carrying it

out, representation can be carried out to the mutual advantage of both sectors. However, local arrangements are often fragile and under-resourced, so investment in skills development and relationship-building needs to be seen as a priority. Key to this will be the ability on the part of people acting as third sector representatives, as well as their governmental counterparts, to understand their respective roles, their accountabilities, their mandates and their responsibilities.



*Lucy de Groot*  
**Executive Director**

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## authorship

This report has been written by Jane Harris, Ben Cairns, Mike Aiken and Romayne Hutchison. It is based on research carried out by the authors, together with Alison Ewart and Patricia Young. Thanks to Helen Hughes and Joanna Stuart for their comments and suggestions.



# executive summary

This research on representation in the third sector has its roots in two earlier studies carried out in partnership between IVAR (the Institute for Voluntary Action Research) and the IDeA (the Improvement and Development Agency). *Making it real*, published in 2006<sup>j</sup>, described a new way of tackling the challenges of cross-sector partnership working, the Partnership Improvement Programme. Addressing the issue of representation, we noted numerous difficulties – with communication, reporting, accountability and expectations:

*“in almost all of the pilot areas, arrangements for the involvement of VCOs<sup>1</sup> in planning and strategic partnerships were seen as problematic and a critical barrier to more effective partnership working...In some areas, LA<sup>2</sup> officers made clear their preference for local VCOs to ‘speak with one voice’. VCS<sup>3</sup> participants, on the other hand, had difficulty with the notion of ‘representing’ a sector that is extremely diverse and, in some areas, increasingly competitive...It was widely felt that partnership working would be improved by both parties having clearer expectations of how representation of, and consultation with, the VCS might best and most appropriately be achieved, within the constraints of available resources.”*

In February 2008 we published our research on the advocacy role of multi-purpose, community anchor organisations<sup>i</sup>. Again we found that there was *“widespread interest within local authorities for the VCS in general to ‘speak with one voice’”*. In addition, there was concern about cross-sector relationships being characterised by, at best, a lack of trust and mutual understanding and, at worst, antagonism and hostility.

There has long been an expectation that local voluntary and community (or ‘third sector’) organisations will at times be able to *speak on behalf of others* (ie other third sector organisations), or ‘represent’ a collective

view to the local authority and other statutory partners. Within the context of heightened policy interest in the ‘voice and representation’ role of the third sector<sup>iii</sup>, these earlier studies confirm that representation is, on the one hand, complex and contested and, on the other hand, necessary and desirable. However, despite the emergence of practical guidance and toolkits, gaps remain in our knowledge, for example:

- What different types of representation structures are operating?
- How are they organised and funded?
- What challenges do they face?
- What difference do they make?

Our research, based on ten case studies of different representation structures across England, was designed to answer these questions.

Four key learning points emerge from our findings:

1. The notion of ‘speaking with one voice’ has no place in debates about representation. Not only does it ignore the heterogeneous nature of the third sector at a local level, it also risks compromising and undermining the very diversity and breadth for which the third sector is valued by local commissioners and planners.

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1 voluntary and community organisations

2 local authorities

3 voluntary and community sector

2. In order to embrace the diversity of the third sector, it is incumbent upon local authorities to accept a range of arrangements for representation. In any one area, this might include an Assembly, two or three thematic groups and a variety of neighbourhood groupings. At the same time, there is an equal responsibility on the part of third sector organisations to organise in ways that allow viewpoints and arguments to be presented in an efficient and coherent fashion. Where necessary or appropriate, this co-ordination work is likely to include mechanisms to ensure that concerns from the frontline (eg from a neighbourhood forum) are communicated to the highest level (eg to the Local Strategic Partnership).
3. The organisation and management of representation is complex and time-consuming: debates about membership; the challenge of being inclusive; the pressure to achieve consensus; the plethora of meetings and consultations – all of these require time and money. In practice, funding to support the organisation of representative activities and structures is, at best, uncertain and, at worst, unavailable. Given this, two options emerge: first, local authorities may need to recognise that, in order to engage with the third sector, new ways of funding that engagement are required. Second, third sector organisations might usefully reflect on the multiple benefits which can accrue from their own participation in representation structures (for example, policy influence and resource acquisition), and consider the extent to which time can be contributed and shared for free.
4. Finally, our study confirms that representation is a core element of the relationship between the third sector and local government. It is, and is likely to remain, high on the agenda, not just as a policy expectation but also because it offers opportunities for local policies, services and resource distribution to be shaped by

local organisations and, in turn, local communities and residents. Thus, despite its complexity and the challenges of carrying it out, representation cannot be ignored. Investment in skills development and relationship building, therefore, needs to be seen as a priority, for both sectors. Key to this will be the ability on the part of people acting as third sector representatives, and their governmental counterparts, to understand their roles, their accountabilities, their mandates and their responsibilities.

Our study findings do not offer a prescription or a solution. There is no one-size-fits-all method for solving the puzzle of representation. However, they do reveal examples of arrangements which, in their local context, have successfully grappled with key aspects of organisation and management: purpose, membership, communications and so on. They do not amount to a check list, but they do offer a pointer to practices which, on balance, it seems advisable to adopt.

# part one: introduction to the study

## the importance of representation

There has long been an expectation that local voluntary and community (or 'third sector') organisations will at times be able to *speak on behalf of others* (ie other third sector organisations), or 'represent' a collective view to the local authority and other statutory partners. More recently, policy-makers have become increasingly interested in the representative function of the third sector. It has also been an issue of growing practical importance for practitioners in both the statutory sector and third sector, not least because there are inherent difficulties associated with the organisation and management of representation.<sup>iv</sup>

## policy context

Cross-sector partnerships and joint working arrangements - to determine social needs and consider which services need to be commissioned - have become part of the local institutional landscape. Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), the establishment of Local Area Agreements (LAAs), and the policy push towards the third sector delivering commissioned public services, have all reinforced the need for organisations to work together across sectors. Implicit in many of the statements about third sector involvement in LSPs and in other cross-sectoral partnerships is the concept of representation, of third sector participants acting not simply on their own behalf but that of other agencies and local people. The core functions of third sector representatives on the executive boards of LSPs are described, for example, as including taking issues of concern to the partnership and ensuring that many voices are heard and views properly represented as well as giving a sector perspective and flavour to discussions and decisions<sup>v</sup>.

In addition, '*representation and advocacy*', alongside '*place shaping*' were emphasised in the local government white paper<sup>vi</sup> in 2006, while a subsequent government

discussion paper emphasised the role of the third sector, particularly within LSPs, in providing "*voice and representation for citizens and communities*"<sup>vii</sup>. Most recently the white paper *Communities in control* has again underlined the sector's ability to "*give a voice and drive change; most powerfully where third sector organisations work together*"<sup>viii</sup>. Such roles are seen as complementary to, rather than undermining of, the democratic role of local councils.

For the local third sector, with its myriad of organisations and groups, these developments have underlined the need to find new ways to organise together. Third sector infrastructure organisations have been expected to play a lead role in these processes and the need for both generalist and specialist umbrella bodies to perform this task was pointed out by the Home Office<sup>ix</sup>. Without some collective mechanisms in place, statutory partners are faced with consulting a bewildering array of third sector organisations. Meanwhile the third sector may not know how, where or when, to make its voice heard, although it may have a strong desire for genuine partnership to improve local conditions.

For both sectors, therefore, the development of appropriate representation structures is a key issue.

## how the term 'representation' is used in this report

The term 'representation' can be used in a variety of ways. Being 'representative' can mean being 'similar', 'nominated', 'elected', 'presenting a case for' and 'answerable to'<sup>x</sup>. Other researchers have pointed out there is both 'substantive representation' (acting directly for the interests of constituents and offering tangible benefits) and 'symbolic representation' (standing for the interests of constituents on the basis of an established trust and legitimacy)<sup>xi</sup>. Another important aspect noted

by a Treasury report is that representation is not the same as community involvement: *“participation makes a third sector organisation more representative of those it services...it does not necessarily make it representative of the community as a whole”*<sup>xii</sup>. We draw on these ideas, using ‘representation’ to describe the *act of a person (or organisation) speaking on behalf of a group of third sector organisations*.

### problems with making representation work

Representation is important and necessary, but it can be problematic in practice for both sectors. Findings from the IDeA/IVAR Partnership Improvement Programme found that *“both local authority and third sector participants [experience] real difficulties around the theme of representation”*<sup>xiii</sup>.

Previous research confirms that third sector organisations (TSOs) face a number of challenges in representing a third sector perspective to the statutory sector. These include unequal power relationships making it difficult for TSOs to speak out, lack of resources, difficulty in understanding the culture of another sector, the diversity and breadth of the third sector itself and practical difficulties in communicating information to and from the third sector<sup>xiv</sup>.

In part, policy-makers have accepted that there will be *“a range of voices representing and being accountable to diverse needs and interests”*<sup>xv</sup>. However, at a local level, there is often an expectation within statutory bodies that the third sector should collectively provide ‘one voice’<sup>xvi</sup> on a given issue, and a sense of frustration when this is not forthcoming. In reality, though, there are likely to be multiple voices and accountabilities across any set of third sector organisations because of their differing stakeholders, missions and governance arrangements.

Tensions can occur when the legitimacy and validity of the views being represented are questioned by statutory

partners, in particular when crucial decisions are being made<sup>xvii</sup>. Those involved in representation structures may feel particularly vulnerable to this accusation. Third sector forums can tend to privilege large, well-resourced third sector organisations, while disadvantaging or excluding smaller groups. In addition there may not always be adequate resources available to engage with stakeholders to the degree that these organisations would wish.

In response to these concerns, the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA), following work initiated by the Department for Communities and Local Government, has recently issued guidance entitled *Principles of representation*<sup>xviii</sup>, which sets out seven themes which should underpin good practice in this field, including accountability, equality, leadership and purpose. The Urban Forum, in conjunction with the IDeA and the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA), conducted research in 2008 into the relationship of local councillors to community representatives<sup>xix</sup>, while NAVCA commenced during the winter of 2008 on ‘recipes for community representation’<sup>xx</sup>.

### purpose of this study

Until recently there has been relatively little evidence collected and analysed for practitioners about the variety of ways in which representation is organised and managed in local settings. In short, what different types of representation structures are operating? How are they organised and funded? What challenges do they face? What difference do they make?

This qualitative study was an attempt to begin to answer these questions in order to offer support to both third sector and local authority practitioners. Our primary focus was both the representative ‘function’ – particularly the aims and goals underlying representation structures – and the representative ‘role’, especially expectations of the



behaviour of individuals charged with communicating a third sector perspective.

## how the study was conducted

The study was led by IVAR (The Institute for Voluntary Action Research), an independent research institute, on behalf of the IDeA (the Improvement and Development Agency for local government). Ten representation structures across England were studied between May and August 2008. These were chosen to cover:

- different *types of structures* (assemblies, forums etc);
- different *types of local authorities* (two-tier county, metropolitan, unitary, district, and borough structures);
- urban and rural settings.

Within these categories some attempt was made to cover representation arrangements operating at different levels (such as a neighbourhood forum operating within a city). In addition, two structures were studied which were devoted to particular issues, in this case homelessness, and children and young people. The locations of the ten representation structures are listed below.

In each location the research team gathered the views of key informants in both the statutory sector and third sector, carrying out a total of 35 interviews and one focus group. The study also included the supplementary examination of related documents and websites and was underpinned by a review of policy and research literature in the area.

## how the report is organised

The rest of this report is organised as follows:

- Part two contains a discussion of the different ways in which third sector representation might be organised, managed and resourced, drawing upon examples from

our study.

- Part three offers policy-makers and practitioners - in both the statutory and third sectors - some emerging lessons about representation which may be helpful to people at a local level.
- Appendix one contains further detail about the structures included in this study, including their aims, membership arrangements, key activities, and impact.
- Appendix two includes a list of documents referred to in this report.

**table 1: representation structures covered in the research**

<i>Location</i>	<i>Type of Representation Structure</i>	<i>LA Type</i>	<i>Urban/ rural</i>	<i>Name</i>
<i>Tynedale</i>	Community Development Network	Shire District (*)	Rural	Tynedale Community Development Network
<i>Brighton &amp; Hove</i>	Neighbourhood Community Forum	Unitary	Urban	Portland Road and Clarendon Forum
<i>Croydon</i>	Third sector representation to LSP	London borough	Urban	Community Network
<i>Camden</i>	Third sector Theme Network (children and young people)	London borough	Urban	Camden Children and Families Network
<i>Ipswich</i>	Third sector Theme Groups (homelessness)	Borough council (*)	Urban	Hostels Liaison Group
<i>Leeds</i>	Community Empowerment Network	Met district	Urban	Leeds Community Empowerment Network (Leeds Voice)
<i>Norfolk</i>	Third sector County-wide Forum	County: two-tier	Rural	VCS Together North Norfolk
<i>Gloucestershire</i>	Voluntary Sector Assembly	County: two-tier	Mixed	Gloucestershire Assembly for the Voluntary and Community Sector
<i>Hampshire</i>	County Network of third sector networks	County: two-tier	Mixed	Voluntary Sector Consortium
<i>London</i>	Campaigning Coalition	Cross-borough	Urban	The East London Community Organisation (TELCO)

*Note (\*) = local authority re-organisation underway*

# part two: the organisation and management of representation - examples from practice

## introduction

In this part of the report we look at how third sector representation is organised and managed, drawing upon examples from our case studies. It covers:

- representation structures;
- the representation role;
- resourcing representation;
- achieving legitimacy;
- reconciling the tensions between incorporation and independence;
- the impact of representation.

Key informants who took part in the case studies are referred to as 'study participants'; where appropriate we provide direct quotes (indicated in italics) from our fieldwork interviews.

## representation structures

### overview

The statutory sector today is a complex entity even at neighbourhood level, and comprises a wide range of agencies and partnerships. Multiple stakeholders - from the public, private and third sectors –are engaged in governance arrangements concerning local policy and delivery. Even within one particular area of work, for example children and young people, in one local authority area there may be as many as 24 separate boards, sub-boards and task groups operating (as is the case in Camden). This is not unusual or necessarily extravagant when multi-agency links are needed to ensure the safety, quality and coherence of services. In counties with two-tier structures, operating across a wider range of services and attempting to incorporate the interests of districts, this complexity multiplies further<sup>xxi</sup>.

Third sector organisations wishing to contribute to the assessment of needs, as well as to deliver services, need to find ways into this web. Even for larger organisations this may be a daunting task to undertake alone. The sector comprises a broad range of groups which are not standardised in terms of origins, remit, size or funding; they reach a diverse set of people – it is these features which are often most valued. For them to come together within representation structures which will link into the already complex pattern of statutory boards is not easy. For this reason third sector representation structures tend to be correspondingly complex. This is especially the case in two-tier settings, but even at a neighbourhood level they may require a significant investment of time to maintain the links with members and partners required to progress the work. The creation of a variety of forms – including forums, networks, assemblies and consortia – which are tailored to local circumstances, testifies to the sophistication needed to deal with this complexity.

Any representation structure is likely to have to grapple with a set of inherent challenges which may include some or all of the following:

- What are its aims and values?
- In what ways does it make itself accountable to other organisations or networks?
- Who are the members – is it inclusive?
- How are individual representatives chosen?
- How do these representatives report back?
- How is the structure managed – are decisions transparent?
- How is it resourced?
- What impact does it have on statutory partners?
- What benefits does it offer to the third sector?

We now look at how these issues have been addressed by the representation structures we studied.

### summary

- The complexity of local authority governance and partnership arrangements for service delivery and policy formulation, combined with the diversity of the third sector, means that structures to facilitate third sector representation are often necessarily complicated.
- Representation structures need to address numerous challenges relating to their purpose, membership, accountability, resourcing and management.

## examples and learning from this study

### i. aims and origins of representation structures

We found that the aims of the representation structures studied were codified with differing degrees of formality. As might be expected, less complex, neighbourhood-based structures had relatively fewer formalised written goals compared to the quite extensive terms of reference found in, say, the county-wide structures. In some locations the representation structure was itself a constituted organisation with specific aims and a constitution, but mostly they were coalitions of groups with some form of agreement between the parties involved. We also found the original objectives of some of these entities had not been to act in a representative capacity. In such cases the function was discovered, enhanced, or agreed upon, and came, over time, to be an important focus. In other settings the representation structure had been constructed deliberately to fulfil this function.

### summary

- Representation structures vary considerably in the extent to which their terms of reference are formalised.
- Some structures in our study were established with the explicit aim of fulfilling a representative function; in others representation had not been the original aim.

### ii. types of representation structure

In this study we looked at a variety of representation structures. We found some of the typical terms used ('network', 'forum', 'assembly' or 'consortium') were not usually a guide to scale or reach. For convenience we have grouped these structures into four categories based on their activity:

- within towns or dispersed areas. These were close-knit structures with either relatively informal arrangements

or operations at a neighbourhood level (such as in Tynedale or the Portland Road and Clarendon Forum in Brighton and Hove):

*'There are very brief terms of reference. It has never been a formal organisation because the district council were so supportive.'* ;

- at a borough or city-wide level (such as in Croydon and Leeds). In addition, two structures within this category also specialised in the needs of a particular group; we have called these 'theme groups' (in Camden on children and young people's issues and in Ipswich on homelessness issues):

*'There is a written constitution for the group and it is accepted that members have different views about some things but are united in getting the borough to do things.'*

*'The Network's aim is to play an active role in the partnership...my view is there are common expectations and there is common understanding about the aims although not always on means to reach these. There is, however, a high degree of commitment and ownership.'*;

- at a county-wide level within two-tier arrangements (Norfolk, Gloucestershire and Hampshire).

All of the structures within these three groups had some links to Local Strategic Partnerships or Local Area Agreements – whether through formal seats on a board or through looser connections. We also identified a fourth kind of structure which was active:

- at a cross-borough level as a coalition of campaigning citizen action groups. This did not have a strong focus on local authority structures (eg TELCO in east London):

*'a diverse alliance of community leaders and active*

*citizens who share a commitment to action for the common good.'*

During the study we found a variety of other complementary, additional or sub-networks covering different themes or constituencies in these locations. We did not attempt to cover all of these. We looked at *examples* of representation structures and do not suggest that they are the *only* such entity in their area.

Table 2 overleaf summarises the key features of each type of representation structure:

**table 2: types of representation structure and examples**

<i>structure</i>	<i>examples</i>	<i>features</i>
<i>close-knit</i>	Tynedale Community Development Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Began as a support network for development workers.</li> <li>• Gradually became a vehicle for representing views to the council and partnerships.</li> <li>• Cross-sector membership.</li> </ul>
	Portland Road & Clarendon Forum (Brighton & Hove)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Began as a Neighbourhood Action Group by a community development trust.</li> <li>• Represents the views of active neighbourhood groups mostly volunteers.</li> <li>• Operates via bi-monthly meetings with action followed up by a part-time development worker.</li> <li>• Community groups operating in the area nominate a representative to the forum.</li> </ul>
<i>borough or city-wide</i>	Leeds Community Empowerment Network (Leeds Voice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up to represent views of third sector</li> <li>• Structure is one of many developed as a consequence of neighbourhood renewal policy</li> </ul>
	Croydon Community Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Original funding came from the Community Empowerment Network.</li> <li>• Offers a space for local groups to voice issues to statutory organisations especially the Local Strategic Partnership.</li> <li>• A network of networks representing communities of interest, geography or expertise.</li> </ul>
<i>borough or city-wide (theme group)</i>	Hostels Liaison Group, Ipswich	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up and run by voluntary and community groups in the single homelessness field.</li> <li>• Represents the views of homeless agencies and seeks to improve services for the client group.</li> <li>• Works with statutory organisations and networks.</li> </ul>
	Camden Children & Families Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operates in an environment where joined-up working is critical.</li> <li>• Acts as a conduit for third sector involvement in developing and delivering policy.</li> <li>• Co-ordinates views of a wide range of third sector organisations.</li> </ul>

<i>county-wide</i>	Gloucestershire Assembly for the Voluntary & Community Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sophisticated structure to bring together third sector organisations at county and district level.</li> <li>• High degree of formality required to manage complexity.</li> <li>• Provides a strategic voice for third sector organisations.</li> <li>• Relates to the county-wide strategic body.</li> </ul>
	Hampshire Voluntary Sector Consortium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Began from ChangeUp funding.</li> <li>• A network made up of more than ten third-sector networks.</li> <li>• Aims to enable the constituent networks to represent views to the statutory sector.</li> <li>• Relates to county-wide bodies and the Local Strategic Partnership.</li> </ul>
	VCS Together North Norfolk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Began with the help of Local Strategic Partnership funding.</li> <li>• Provides an open forum for all third sector organisations in the area.</li> <li>• Runs steering group, conferences and themed events.</li> <li>• Aims to influence public services and local development.</li> </ul>
<i>campaigning coalition</i>	The East London Community Organisation (TELCO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission is to campaign collectively.</li> <li>• Target of campaigns is usually public sector organisations.</li> <li>• Has developed mechanisms for gathering views of third sector organisations in order to develop campaigns and represent those views.</li> </ul>

These examples demonstrate that there is no 'one size fits all' structure for third sector representation. In particular, structures need to be appropriate to meet the needs of the organisations or partnerships which they are relating to, the groups being represented, as well as the setting in which representation is active.

#### summary

- Our study considered examples of four different types of representation structure: close-knit structures; structures operating at a borough or city-wide level

(sometimes focusing on a particular theme or issue); county-wide structures; a cross-borough coalition.

- All of the structures except the cross-borough coalition had links to LSPs.

#### co-ordinating and undertaking representation

Third sector representation structures may be complicated out of necessity, but, however carefully constructed they are, the role of animating them in practice by trusted and

skilful staff or volunteers remains crucial.

*Co-ordinating* and *undertaking* representation can be distinguished as two separate tasks. The former involves managing the representation structure and, on some occasions, facilitating the access of other third sector networks to the negotiating table. The latter involves collecting and then articulating collective views in a systematic way, as well as feeding back and keeping people informed; this often requires careful and sensitive preparation and management of meetings:

*'My role is to ensure information flows in both directions and issues are shared.'*

The role was also described as facilitative:

*'I don't know the detail on a given issue – but I can say that they need to consult the voluntary sector organisations on a particular issue...'*

In some structures the task of co-ordinating and undertaking representation might be necessarily combined in one person's core responsibilities – and a worker may move skilfully between them in certain settings. This can be seen in the Hampshire Consortium, the Hostels Liaison Group and Portland Road and Clarendon Forum. Maintaining clarity of roles, both in meetings with statutory bodies and within forums, was an important, though often unremarked upon, skill.

There was widespread acknowledgement of the need for trust in the lead people responsible for *co-ordinating* representation structures, to ensure a fair and inclusive approach to membership and agenda-setting. People *undertaking* representation also need to be skilled. For example, some of those we interviewed thought that there was a particular responsibility to distinguish between

the interests of their own organisation and the collective interests of a group of agencies on behalf of which they were representing. In some areas an explicit emphasis has been placed on how representatives should play their role:

*'We do have person specs for all the roles and we emphasise that people speak on behalf of the sector and not on behalf of their own organisation.'*

*'My role is to provide viewpoints rather than individual concerns.'*

*'It is not about having a representative on every issue...it is about having an infrastructure to make representation more effective.'*

We found only two examples of support being provided for the representative role through training and reimbursement:

*'We also provide skills training to the reps as well... training them about the roles and responsibilities. This is very important in terms of good practice. We try to elaborate some policy of reimbursement, because some of them are unpaid.'*

### summary

- Co-ordinating and undertaking representation can be distinguished as separate tasks, requiring different skills.
- The skills needed by people undertaking representation include the ability to distinguish between the interests of their own agency and the collective interests of a group of agencies on whose behalf they are acting. Support for the representative role through training or financial reimbursement is, however, rare.



## achieving legitimacy

Representation structures need to gain legitimacy in both directions: with constituent third sector groups and with statutory partners. A number of study participants described enduring difficulties around membership:

*'Who is being represented can be difficult – because people outside will say they are not represented but most of the people involved are from organisations and are activists, people who are passionate and prepared to do something.'*

We found examples of efforts being made to establish or reinforce the legitimacy of a representative structure by developing clear and careful processes for gathering views, feeding back to the wider sector and electing or appointing representatives. Croydon, Camden and Hampshire offer just three of many examples. There were often prior consultations with stakeholders, agreements on views that would be put forward and report back mechanisms to constituent groups following partnership meetings – the process involved in representation was widely identified as important:

*'The process is not incidental...it's a goal – it's a civic good in its own right... We try to get our members to build respectful relations...we have to be broad-based, inclusive and large.'*

In practice, these mechanisms appeared to help establish credibility and trust with the third sector, but did not always affect the views of other partners.

Some third sector representatives felt that their legitimacy was sometimes questioned in partnerships and on boards in a way that was not the case with those from the business or statutory sectors. There were also concerns

about the legitimacy of representation structures when there was a potential or perceived overlap between a representation structure and other infrastructure bodies operating in the same area:

*'With a sizeable sector it's not surprising that there are other local coalitions and organisations with representative functions. I don't think it's seen as the only body in the sector to perform that role...'*

Blurred boundaries between different agencies and a representation structure can create confusion for local third sector groups and statutory players. Learning from cross-sector working processes pioneered through the joint local authority/third sector Partnership Improvement Programme (PIP) may offer some support for tackling these issues. Alongside establishing appropriate structures, PIP participants have highlighted the importance of establishing transparent procedures for consultation and feedback, and seeking ways to build mutual understanding and respect between representatives from different sectors.

### summary

- The processes involved in representation, and in particular for establishing the legitimacy of representation structures, are seen as important by third sector organisations.
- Third sector representatives, however, sometimes feel that their legitimacy is questioned. The legitimacy of the representation structures themselves can also be questioned, especially where such structures overlap with the work of infrastructure bodies working in the same area.

## resourcing representation

In the areas we studied, the work of building and maintaining representation structures – even in the most local of cases and with volunteer support – cost time and money. Funding for these structures was fragile and problematic. The commissioning of services has, in some cases, made it harder for staff to engage in activities that are not costed to a given service. The need for funding to enable organisations to recover the costs of attending statutory groups has been stressed.

Most of the representation structures in our study had uncertain or short-term funding, raising questions about their longer-term sustainability. Some had been supported by Community Empowerment Network resources which were now ending (as in Croydon, Leeds, and Brighton & Hove); others had residual monies from other programmes (for example, Change Up in Hampshire). A few had secured monies via the LSP (as in North Norfolk and Gloucestershire).

In some locations (for example, Leeds) there was a move to diversify income streams by taking on additional services in order to support representation activities. Such developments might add to the complexity of the representative function. Elsewhere, for example in the campaigning coalition TELCO, income has been drawn from membership fees; in addition, highly motivated participants have offered in-kind contributions of skills and labour.

The Hampshire Consortium, in a two-tier setting, has a part-time worker, resourced by remaining Change Up funding, who acts as a secretariat to the consortium. This co-ordination helps the consortium maintain communication flows, arrange meetings and conduct consultations. Most of those who sit on the consortium are paid workers from voluntary agencies.

The Gloucestershire Assembly is supported by a team of four members of staff from the county-wide CVS, who

service meetings and support third sector representatives on the multi-sector partnerships. The core costs of the assembly come from the county council. The lead statutory bodies on each multi-sector thematic partnership also provide funding to resource third sector representation. Some costs are not covered. 'Backfill' – paying third sector organisations for time that their staff have spent participating in the assembly - remains a concern:

*'What the assembly team provides are the costs of basic administration, venues, information. What there isn't money to pay for is backfill to pay for third sector representation. The only place that that happens is on the local Gloucester LSP on some of their work on equalities...'*

North Norfolk's representation work is underpinned by supportive statutory funding:

*'Where we have got a positive local authority and a very positive LSP then we will do more than a standard CVS. Where funding is miniscule...we will provide some support to third sector and have a seat on the LSP. We won't do what we don't have funding for. That's why North Norfolk is different.'*

## summary

- The resourcing of representation structures is often problematic. In a few localities structures are well supported by statutory funding, enabling paid staff to be employed to service meetings and support representatives. In many cases, however, this funding is uncertain or short-term.
- The need for 'backfill' funding to pay third sector organisations for the time spent by staff acting as representatives at statutory sector meetings is a concern in several areas.

## the impact of representation

It was hard for many participants to describe the impact that could be attributed to the work of their representation structure.

Groups with a neighbourhood focus found it easier to define their achievements in tangible ways. For example, the Portland Road and Clarendon Forum could point to significant changes in the local environment as a result of its actions. The forum achieved a major success in relation to the redevelopment of the local park, which was subsequently awarded a Green Flag, and the café within the park, now a valued community meeting place. The forum has also had an impact in relation to parking problems, repairs to cracked pavements and improvements to the local skate-park, including securing money for a worker to train young people. These successes are attributed to the forum's culture of partnership working:

*'the forum gave a vehicle for all the different groups to come together and work together in a strong partnership'.*

In Camden, groups pointed to benefits for local people arising from better partnership working. There were a number of improved outcomes for children and young people which were attributed to the network's engagement with the Children and Young People's Partnership. These included: improvements in school attendance as a result of better co-ordination and focus by the various organisations dealing with this issue; improved mental health services for young people; fewer children coming into care as a result of earlier interventions; and a reduction in the numbers of young people re-offending. Third sector interviewees felt that these improvements, and an ability for the local authority to be more effectively held to account by the sector, were

important outcomes which could be attributed to the opportunity for them to engage directly with the process of developing local policies and services.

For some of the complex two-tier structures, the benefits were more likely to be visible at a 'second level' – improving contracting and commissioning processes, increasing the relevance of a service, developing better policy, enhancing communication between third sector organisations and statutory organisations working with the same groups.

The benefits of improving processes and organisational arrangements through representation can seem less obvious and may take longer to accrue, but they may be crucial enabling mechanisms in the long term. The third sector in Gloucestershire lobbied successfully for an environment theme group to be included within the Local Area Agreement. As one interviewee pointed out:

*'There wasn't going to be a multi-sector environment partnership as part of the Gloucestershire Conference [the county-wide strategic body] and there wasn't going to be an environment block as part of the Local Area Agreement. ...several third sector leads pulled together a working group to get it off the ground and lobbied very hard to get it included in the LAA, which it was.'*

The Gloucestershire Assembly also records and publishes four or five key achievements each quarter which demonstrate the incremental progress across different areas.

These examples illustrate that effective representation can yield tangible benefits for partners and for local people. Local authority interviewees also highlighted the value of local representation structures *"providing a powerful vehicle for the expression of opinions and achievement of action"* and described how well-organised arrangements

for representation had *“led to improved partnership working and ensured that the local authority can now be more effectively held to account by the third sector”*.

Nevertheless, there was widespread agreement that representation structures may make little impact if they are seeking to influence ineffective partnerships, for example where *“the whole LSP process is of little consequence”* or does not meet regularly. There will be a similar effect if local authorities are not genuinely receptive to outside influence.

A high national policy priority in some arenas, such as work with children and young people, can clearly produce an intense commitment to partnership working and the inclusion of third sector organisations in representation work. In other arenas the policy climate seems lukewarm at present and this *may* account for some of the difficulties that groups face in engaging effectively with statutory structures. Even with carefully established structures and a favourable policy environment, if there are poor cross-sector working relations between significant leaders - or ineffective structures at third sector and local authority level with top heavy LSPs - representation is not likely to be growing on fertile ground. In addition, if statutory bodies are not receptive to hearing the views of local organisations, the impact of representation can be limited. A number of study participants reported problems in establishing links with some statutory staff:

*“we should have better links with them – but they never come to meetings – we have to beg them.”*

However, we also found isolated examples of the two sectors working together effectively to achieve shared goals:

*“It’s an equal approach...The decision-making process is transparent and reflects the views of all the reps, including the voluntary sector. There is no closed door. The decisions are made clearly around the table...”*

### summary

- Structures with a neighbourhood focus, and those working on a particular theme, found it easier to define their achievements in tangible ways than those operating in complex two-tier structures, eg across a whole county.
- The benefits of more complex representation structures could, however, still be identified in terms of improved commissioning processes, enhanced cross-sectoral communication or services that were more relevant to the needs of local people.
- The impact of representation structures may be affected by the degree of national policy commitment to particular issues, local cross-sectoral working relationships and the extent to which statutory bodies wish to hear the views of local organisations.

# part three: lessons about representation

## introduction

In this part of the report we summarise key lessons drawn from our analysis of the case study findings. These are grouped under the following headings:

- the importance of context and history;
- acknowledging the complexity of representation;
- the challenge of acting as a representative;
- managing expectations of 'one voice';
- managing representation structures;
- demonstrating accountability;
- resources and skills;
- focus on purpose.

## the importance of context and history

In some localities in this study there was evidence of a *disengaged* relationship between local authorities and third sector organisations. Histories of antagonism, lack of professional relationships, ineffective forums, political disagreements and issues of structures, scale and size may account for some of these ruptures. It is unlikely that local authorities and TSOs can always be in total harmony. Nevertheless where there is no kind of relationship, both parties may need help to consider where there could be areas of constructive engagement and what the stepping stones might be towards this. Joint training, awareness and capacity-building work on roles and skills, and engagement of national umbrella bodies from both sectors, may assist in building or rebuilding these links.

How representation works in practice is also affected by the policy context in which representation is happening and the history of how a representation structure developed. A policy context which encourages, or even demands, joint working between sectors, can be

conducive to effective representation. But the policy context can change over time and representation structures can become more or less relevant. Therefore, they will need to adapt to their changing environment.

Some representation structures began their organisational life without an intention to represent; others were set up entirely for that purpose. The historical roots of a representation structure will affect its legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders, and it will be important for those co-ordinating and managing the structure to respond appropriately to stakeholders' expectations.

## acknowledging the complexity of representation

Representation structures have arisen from different origins, relate to a different range of third sector organisations, in a variety of geographical settings. Their form is therefore likely to vary in different locations according to local contexts and needs. There is no ideal type, 'one-size-fits-all' representation structure and it will always need energetic and committed people to make it work. Representation structures should reflect the complexity of both the groups and issues they aim to represent and the statutory bodies to whom they are representing.

It is important, therefore, for local authorities in particular to understand that third sector representation structures will sometimes need to be complex. They relate to many partnerships and boards and need to find ways to link to the existing statutory sector frameworks if they are to perform their role.

Key ingredients that may be present in a third sector representation structure are:

- a large and multi-faceted range of third sector organisations and networks;

- linkages to other parallel representation structure(s) (ie the multitude of local forums and interest groups which reflect different thematic issues, types of organisation, geographical concerns, etc);
- an attempt either to facilitate or to directly represent third sector interests to the target statutory body/s, partnership(s) or other organisations;
- lines of communication going back and forward between the representation structure and the constituent organisations, which will carry accountability and consultation messages (sometimes simultaneously).

### the challenge of acting as a representative

Representation *structures* exist to bring together different groups and individuals; individuals then act as ‘representatives’, on behalf of the group, in order to communicate the views and interests of the group to others.

Representation *roles* are complex and demand high-level skills, trust and clarity of purpose. Fundamental questions that the representative structure will need to resolve if the individual representatives are to enact their role effectively include:

- How are representatives selected?
- Will representatives go to meetings with a prepared script?
- To what extent do representatives have a mandate to use their own discretion?
- How are representatives briefed to represent? How do they report back to those whom they represent and are accountable?

Co-ordinating and undertaking representation are both important roles which require specialist skills. Individuals

need to be responsive, proactive and keenly aware of both their local context and the wider policy environment. As well as requiring negotiating skills, the ability to speak persuasively and the ability to understand and synthesise complex information, individual representatives need to be able to define their identity in arenas where they are charged with representing.

There is very little training and support available to help people to develop those skills, although this is beginning to change. Specialist training for people engaged in representation is a welcome development, although it might perhaps be extended to enable joint, cross-sector initiatives, rather than being targeted primarily at third sector representatives.

Developing skills will often take time, but prerequisites for being an effective representative are willingness to undertake the role, goodwill and determination. Conversely, if these are not present, effective representation can be undermined.

### managing expectations of ‘one voice’

Representation structures are unlikely ever to carry all the voices of the local third sector, even in a close-knit structure.

There are multiple voices within the sector and at times a representation structure may find that it is not able to present ‘one voice.’<sup>xxiii</sup> For this reason mechanisms for giving and receiving feedback are extremely important, as are terms of reference that set out how the views of the sector will be gathered and presented. Furthermore, and drawing on our earlier research in this area<sup>xxiv</sup>, the internally heterogeneous nature of the third sector seems to necessitate different approaches to the issue of representation.

First, local authorities might consider developing

approaches to management and liaison which are flexible enough to accommodate the diverse nature of the sector. As we noted in our earlier research on advocacy<sup>xxv</sup>, it may not be sufficient or appropriate for local authorities to rely on existing formal structures for engagement (eg the LSP) if they are to meet the new policy imperatives around their enabling role<sup>xxvi</sup>. More attention might be paid to the need for new models of representation that, as well as being grounded in local contexts, are also able to reconcile a local authority's desire for efficiency with the wider third sector's commitment to diversity and difference. For some organisations (for example BME groups and smaller, community-based organisations), new bespoke arrangements may be required.

Second, further consideration may also need to be given within local authorities to the development of appropriate, *corporate* structures that can ensure the maintenance of effective and efficient channels of communication with the local third sector. This may require the development of local, tailor-made configurations.

Third, representation is unlikely to work where statutory and business partners do not understand and respect the distinctive role and contribution of the third sector. Similarly, the third sector needs to understand the wider roles of partnerships and statutory agencies; both sectors need to find ways to work together for mutual benefit. Shared development processes that enable sectors to work together to design and fulfil the representative role can be important, particularly as they enable people from different sectors to build understanding and trust through the process. The Partnership Improvement Programme developed by the I&DeA and IVAR<sup>xxvii</sup> offers the opportunity for a joint exploration of expectations, relationships, roles, practices and structures between a local authority and local TSOs in order to form a new, strategic *modus operandi* around representation.

## managing representation structures

Representation structures need co-ordinating and managing if they are to work. The most complex structures in our study – those in Gloucestershire and Hampshire – have both recognised the need for strategic and operational management and strong leadership. This applies equally to the less complex structures – leadership and management cannot be neglected or expected to happen automatically.

Legitimacy may always be open to question, but representation structures will need to strive to include interests beyond the larger third sector organisations, be open to challenge and evaluation and to build transparent feedback and accountability lines to constituent groups<sup>xxviii</sup>. Equally, local authorities may need to have more reasonable expectations of how fully inclusive any representation structure can realistically be.

## demonstrating accountability

Demonstrating accountability is one of the key challenges for representation structures. In some respects this creates a tension arising from ambiguity: first, third sector representative bodies have an accountability to the organisations whose views they are representing; second, they may also be accountable to the same statutory bodies (as funder) to whom they are representing.<sup>xxix</sup>

Who is accountable to whom and why will depend in part on the structure and membership. Even in the more informal, close-knit structures, there needs to be a mechanism for demonstrating accountability and clarity about what that mechanism is. Such mechanisms might include written terms of reference, elections, feedback templates and other written procedures.

## resources and skills

Representation structures need stable resources if they are to undertake a long-term role. In some cases there is a need to reimburse agencies for the time representatives spend away from their agencies' core work. Funding needs to be appropriate for the level of representation; for example, if there is an expectation that one main representative structure will have a seat on many partnerships, that structure needs to be funded to carry out that work. Furthermore, if as is increasingly the case, there is a requirement for local authorities to engage with the local third sector, it seems appropriate for the costs of engagement (for third sector organisations) to be covered.

## focus on purpose

Finally, one of the main challenges that representation structures face is to remain focused on their mission to represent – that is to speak and act on behalf of a wider constituency. There are many examples of representative bodies and structures moving into service delivery, and even competing with those whom they are representing. In these cases accountability and legitimacy can be questioned, and the entire representative role undermined. Adequate funding for the representative role is one way to resolve this issue. Clear terms of reference - including purpose, membership, decision-making and reporting - can also help. Arrangements for regular review can ensure that representation structures continue to be relevant, appropriate and practically useful.



# appendix one: description of the representative structures studied

In appendix one, we describe the **mode of operation** of the representation structures studied. In two-tier settings, such as Gloucestershire, the arrangements may be particularly complicated, involving a range of groups addressing different themes, cross-cutting issues and district concerns, with elections to a central representative body. We provide details of the approach to **membership** of the representation structures. These varied considerably across the structures studied: in some, it was necessary to join formally or to pay a fee; elsewhere, attendance at a meeting, being on a mailing list or simply being based in a particular geographical area bestowed membership. All of these structures were mainly focused on *organisations* or *networks*: it was rare for them to recruit individuals as members. The **focus of representation** is summarised: generally, the external bodies which were the audience for representation were statutory organisations and partnerships. Finally, the range of **activities** in which representation structures were engaged is set out.

## Tynedale Community Development Network

<b>mode of operation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bi-monthly meetings and an annual away-day.</li> <li>• Working groups are sometimes established to discuss particular issues.</li> <li>• The network does not receive any funding, nor employ its own staff.</li> <li>• Set up to do cross-organisational work but does link to the Local Strategic Partnership.</li> </ul>
<b>membership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No specific membership criteria.</li> <li>• Membership open to all relevant organisations (VCS and statutory) in the district.</li> <li>• About 60 organisations are currently members.</li> </ul>
<b>focus of representation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aims to bring together all VCOs in the area to co-ordinate activities, exchange information and identify joint areas of working.</li> <li>• The network sends representatives to the Local Strategic Partnership and takes views to the council.</li> </ul>
<b>key activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brings together staff working in community development in both VCS and statutory sector.</li> <li>• Key stakeholder bodies in the district, including the council and the Local Strategic Partnership, which includes four members of the network, have drawn on the views expressed by members. The county council has also recently been targeted as a result of the proposed change to unitary status.</li> <li>• The network applies for project funding for particular initiatives.</li> </ul>

Portland Road & Clarendon Forum, Brighton and Hove

<p><b>mode of operation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bi-monthly meetings.</li> <li>• Alternate meetings are 'round robin' information sharing and themed meetings.</li> <li>• Aim is for decision-making by consensus.</li> </ul>
<p><b>membership</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal membership criteria and terms of reference.</li> <li>• All VCOs and groups operating in the area can nominate a representative.</li> <li>• No committee – all business takes place at meetings and part-time facilitator carries out any follow up needed.</li> <li>• Ward councillors and some statutory service providers also attend.</li> </ul>
<p><b>focus of representation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The forum represents the local community via local groups.</li> <li>• No particular focus of representation – the aim is to affect quality of life in the area, therefore views of 'the community' are represented to whoever needs to know them.</li> </ul>
<p><b>key activities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primarily concerned with community safety, street disrepair, traffic and parking issues, the state of a local high street.</li> <li>• The local park was identified as a key priority at the first meeting of the forum and this has now been improved.</li> <li>• Additional work has been undertaken on anti-social behaviour issues in a nearby skate park.</li> </ul>

## Croydon Community Network

<p><b>mode of operation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Community Network, established in 2002, is a 'network of networks' facilitated by Croydon Voluntary Action (the CVS for the borough).</li> <li>• It was set up as a partnership between Croydon Voluntary Action, the PCT and the local authority, and aims to be: "a collective voice for communities...its members work collaboratively and strategically to improve Croydon for Croydon people." It seeks to create a space for local activists and community groups to talk to public sector organisations.</li> <li>• The network brings together views from constituent forums representing communities of interest, geography and expertise.</li> <li>• The network meets quarterly.</li> <li>• The network's terms of reference cover its aims, values, ground rules, and facilitation arrangements (concerning meetings and communication methods).</li> <li>• The strategic focus of the network is overseen by a steering group composed of representatives from 15 groups linked to it.</li> <li>• In parallel there is an associated on-line forum, 'Talk2Croydon', where groups and organisations can discuss their views on local issues.</li> </ul>
<p><b>membership</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member networks include: the BME Forum, Volunteer Organisers Forum, Children and Young People's Network, Refugee Forum, faith groups and the Older People's Network.</li> <li>• The network involves over 200 organisations through these individual member networks.</li> </ul>
<p><b>focus of representation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The primary focus of representation is the LSP and other public sector forums.</li> <li>• The Community Network has one of the VCS places on the Local Strategic Partnership Board.</li> </ul>
<p><b>key activities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The network facilitates various thematic forums and focus groups, based on the themes of the borough-wide Local Strategic Partnership. These feed in to the LSP strategy groups and partnerships via elected representatives, and ultimately to the LSP board. Each forum is led by a co-ordinating group.</li> <li>• The network also co-ordinates consultation events and runs focus groups, for example in relation to new strategies being developed by statutory bodies.</li> <li>• It has taken initiatives on themes (such as creating an inclusive Croydon) where it invites members to identify action that needs to be taken in the borough; ideas are then presented to the borough's chief executives group.</li> <li>• The network organises training courses for potential representatives in decision-making structures.</li> <li>• It provides small amounts of funding to forums linked to the network to support their participation.</li> <li>• The network has an extensive database of VCOs in the borough and keeps them in touch with the work of the various forums via its newsletter and web-based information.</li> </ul>

## Camden Children and Families Network

<p><b>mode of operation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Children and Families Network is a stakeholders group of third sector organisations involved in work with children and young people in Camden.</li> <li>• It holds places on the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and the five Every Child Matters sub-boards. Under each of these sub-boards are sub-groups focusing on specific issues. Each group has a formal membership.</li> <li>• There is a formal election process; two representatives from the third sector network sit on the overarching partnership board of 18 people for a two-year term. A minimum of two third-sector representatives are also elected to sit on each sub-board. All third sector representatives are required to report back to the third sector network, via the advisory group which runs and oversees the network meetings.</li> <li>• Training is provided and expenses reimbursed to facilitate the role of representatives.</li> </ul>
<p><b>membership</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership is open to all third sector organisations with an interest in the ECM agenda. There are currently around 100 members.</li> </ul>
<p><b>focus of representation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aims to develop a dialogue between the third sector and statutory agencies about the Every Child Matters agenda and to ensure that providers can play a role in the commissioning cycle.</li> <li>• Co-ordinates views of the third sector to make sure they are appropriately fed into accountable bodies such as the Children and Young People's Partnership and hence into the main commissioning body for third sector services.</li> </ul>
<p><b>key activities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An essential activity for the third sector network is the quarterly meeting. Prior to the network meeting the advisory group examines the partnership board agenda. This is then shared with the network members and representatives take forward agreed issues. A feedback template is used to record the summary points of the discussion; these are then circulated to the network.</li> <li>• The network has co-ordinated the development of a local policy based on Every Child Matters to which all organisations engaged with children and young people in the borough have contributed.</li> </ul>

## Hostels Liason Group, Ipswich

<p><b>mode of operation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The group has a constitution and holds annual elections to posts.</li> <li>• It meets every few months.</li> <li>• The group is engaged with agencies that operate at different levels across the city and county.</li> <li>• It sits on the Local Strategic Partnership and a county-wide panel for providers of supported housing services.</li> <li>• It undertakes work with other agencies such as the probation service, Benefits Office and Primary Care Trust.</li> </ul>
<p><b>membership</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership is open to all third sector organisations providing accommodation or related services in the locality to single homeless people.</li> <li>• Members pay an annual fee which supports the co-ordination of the group.</li> </ul>
<p><b>focus of representation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The group aims to represent the needs of single homeless people across third sector agencies in a co-ordinated way to statutory organisations, particularly the local authority, social services, Housing Benefit Agency, Local Strategic Partnership and central government.</li> <li>• The group has supported a spin-off group of small agencies bidding for contracts.</li> </ul>
<p><b>key activities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members put forward their expertise to the Local Strategic Partnership and a forum for providers of supported housing services.</li> <li>• The group undertakes specific work with other statutory agencies to discuss practical ways of making systems more accessible for single homeless people.</li> </ul>

Leeds Voice (The Community Empowerment Network)	
<b>mode of operation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leeds Voice was established by the voluntary, community and faith sector in the city in 1999 in advance of the policy launch of the Community Empowerment Networks. Today it combines multiple aims including representation and capacity building.</li> <li>• Leeds Voice (Community Empowerment Network) has statements of strategic purpose, core values and vision. It was set up to enable local groups and organisations to be represented in local, strategic decision-making.</li> <li>• Leeds Voice holds a place on the LSP and provides a way of feeding views into the LSP via elected representatives.</li> <li>• Leeds Voice is led by a management committee which includes members of each constituent forum, and aims to reflect small, local, national and faith group members. These forums are each led by a co-ordinating group.</li> </ul>
<b>membership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leeds Voice aims to bring together over 3,300 groups in Leeds. There is an open membership with no formal joining requirements beyond being a part of the voluntary and community sector. Organisations 'join' by agreeing to be listed on the database which means they are readily contactable about the network of group events.</li> </ul>
<b>focus of representation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leeds Voice represents views to the LSP Strategy groups and partnerships to the LSP board.</li> </ul>
<b>key activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leeds Voice aims to "strengthen and represent the voluntary, community and faith sector throughout the Leeds Metropolitan district" by undertaking a wide range of activities, listed below.</li> <li>• It "co-ordinates neighbourhood and city-wide strategic representation through forums, events and training and gives grassroots support to groups so that they can grow stronger and become more involved in the city."</li> <li>• It facilitates various thematic forums and focus groups, based on the themes of the city-wide Local Strategic Partnership which in turn feed in to LSP Strategy groups and partnerships via elected representatives.</li> <li>• It has an extensive database of VCOs in the city and it keeps them in touch with the work of the various forums via its newsletter and web-based information.</li> <li>• It runs training courses for potential representatives in decision-making structures.</li> <li>• It co-ordinates consultation events and runs focus groups, for example in relation to new strategies being developed by statutory bodies.</li> </ul>

**key activities** (continued)

- It enables voluntary, community and faith sector representation and participation in consultation and decision-making at a local level.
- It promotes communication and partnership, through information-sharing, networking and strategic advocacy.
- It aims to ensure that all the work is underpinned by a commitment to “valuing the diversity of the city”.



## VCS Together, North Norfolk

<p><b>mode of operation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The forum is a project managed by Voluntary Norfolk (a CVS which works across the county) and is based on their ‘hub’ and ‘spoke’ model: with the forum able to draw on resources from the county-wide Council for Voluntary Organisations, whilst maintaining a distinct identity.</li> <li>• The forum holds quarterly steering group meetings.</li> <li>• The forum also organises meetings for a wider group of VCOs three times a year; these may focus on a particular theme or issue of concern.</li> <li>• The forum is located within the offices of the district council as part of their in-kind contribution to running costs.</li> <li>• Voluntary Norfolk employs a development co-ordinator to work with the forum and provides the secretariat.</li> </ul>
<p><b>membership</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership is open to all VCOs in the area, with about 300 organisations on the mailing list.</li> <li>• Member VCOs elect the steering group.</li> </ul>
<p><b>focus of representation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The views of forum members are put forward to a range of stakeholders and structures including the district council, the Local Area Agreement and the Local Strategic Partnership – where Voluntary Norfolk leads on one of three thematic groups (concerned with the quality of life) supported by forum members.</li> <li>• A representative of the forum’s steering group sits on the LSP.</li> <li>• The forum helps to guide and inform the work of the county-wide CVS. It also acts as a conduit for engagement with the public sector and identification of local priorities, to <i>“enable the sector to influence decisions concerning the way communities develop and public services are provided.”</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>key activities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Its central aim is to provide an independent forum for VCOs in the area – many of which are very small – by providing a space for VCOs to share ideas, information and good practice.</li> <li>• The forum represents the views of the members on the LSP and sub-groups as well as the LAA.</li> <li>• The forum organises conferences and at least three themed events a year; these may focus on a particular issue of concern such as rural transport.</li> <li>• The forum also provides an e-newsletter and has a page on the Voluntary Norfolk website.</li> </ul>

## Gloucestershire Assembly

### mode of operation

- The assembly provides a structure for representing the third sector (via an Assembly Board of Representatives) to the county's strategic statutory body (the Gloucestershire Conference).
- Thematic strategy groups cover specific issues such as children and young people, health and wellbeing, economic development, environment, safer and stronger communities. These thematic groups represent their interests to the third sector Assembly Board of Representatives which can take on cross-cutting issues and represent these to the LSP.
- The third sector thematic groups also represent specialist issues directly to five corresponding thematic strategic partnerships of the Gloucestershire Conference.
- There are also a range of network groups which cover either geographical areas (such as a district forum) or cross-cutting issues (such as rural matters, advice or learning). These network groups also feed their ideas into the third sector assembly board.
- The third sector assembly board takes forward issues into the Gloucestershire Conference by having a representative who sits on each of three layers of the conference's executive boards.
- The board comprises 15 people who all represent a given third sector thematic strategy group, district forum or cross-cutting theme. The funded thematic strategy groups elect their own chair who also sits on the assembly board. A representative from each district also sits on this board.
- The assembly board has an independent chair who serves for three years.
- Specific development work has begun to address BME representation.
- An assembly team, based at the offices of the Gloucester Association for Voluntary and Community Action (GAVCA) services the work.

### membership

- All VCOs in the county are automatically considered members of the assembly. 748 organisations are known to receive the information bulletin. Members can become more active by joining thematic strategy groups, network groups, attending the annual meeting of the whole assembly or responding to consultations.

### focus of representation

- The assembly seeks to provide a strategic voice from the third sector and to represent views to the county-wide strategic partnerships. Although the primary relationship is with the county and districts, the focus will depend on the issues in question, so at times they also work with businesses.
- Person specifications are developed for all roles; representatives are required to speak on behalf of the sector rather than their own organisation.

<b>key activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The assembly's activities include responding to consultations, organising meetings, disseminating information and ensuring that the third sector is represented on appropriate bodies.</li><li>• It puts forward third sector views to all key strategic bodies including the county-wide conference, the Local Area Agreement, local authorities, the Primary Care Trust and Housing Associations.</li></ul>
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## Hampshire Consortium

### mode of operation

- The consortium meets every few months and is regularly attended by about 15 representatives from several third sector networks.
- The key networks are the Children and Young People's Alliance, Health and Social Care, the network of CVSs in the county, Diversity Network (currently in formation), Social Enterprise, Learning and Skills (about to be re-formed).
- A few representatives from statutory sector partners also attend.
- The Hampshire-wide CVS (Community Action Hampshire) is the accountable body for the consortium.
- The constituent networks are not uniform and have adopted structures appropriate to their specific needs. For example, the social care network rarely meets in person because of its geographical spread, but has conducted extensive on-line consultations involving their groups. The children's network has a dedicated worker, while the diversity network is still fostering involvement from BME groups.
- The consortium has facilitated a simple process to enable a vote for the third sector representatives to sit on the LSP and LAA sub-groups. Consortium members attending these meetings complete a feedback report for their own network and the consortium's next meeting.
- The consortium's aims are constantly stressed – representing the interests of parts of the third sector and not individual organisations.

### membership

- The consortium is a 'network of networks.' By September 2008 the membership consisted of 23 places, including statutory organisations at county and district levels which had non-voting places. Up to eleven networks or groups are represented within the consortium, although some are less active. The intention is to remain open to new networks.

### focus of representation

- The consortium aims to ensure that the interests of the networks are taken into account in the county and region. The primary targets for representational activities are the county council, the LSP and LAA, the Learning and Skills Council and district councils. The Regional Strategic Partnership is also important. Local authority reorganisation may lead to the emergence of a senate body at county level made up of key statutory, private sector and third sector representatives with a voting role on resources.

<b>key activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The consortium holds meetings and email consultations, phone calls and informal consultation with the voluntary sector networks – the mechanisms depend on the network itself. The consortium meets formerly, as a committee, every two months.</li><li>• Consortium representatives attend meetings of, for example, the LSP, sub-groups of the LAA, and the local authority. It also makes representations on particular policies or structures proposed by the local authority, eg on county-wide reorganisation or funding arrangements.</li></ul>
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Telco, east London	
<b>mode of operation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member organisations agree to campaign collectively on a particular issue over the year.</li> <li>• Telco describes itself as <i>'a diverse alliance of community leaders and active citizens' who 'share a commitment to action for the common good'</i>.</li> <li>• 'Listening posts' are established in member organisations (ranging from notice boards to a regular agenda item at a meeting); these act as sounding boards for emerging issues.</li> <li>• Member organisations put forward the priority issues on which they would be prepared to campaign; these are discussed and voted on at an annual assembly which often attracts hundreds of representatives from member organisations.</li> <li>• Member organisations commit themselves to work towards the issues voted as top priorities.</li> <li>• Telco's principles emphasise 'no permanent allies or enemies' and de-emphasise ideological concerns.</li> <li>• The work of Telco has been strongly supported by the Citizen Organising Foundation (COF) which has helped to develop <i>'competent, organised and informed'</i> citizens who can undertake broad-based organising in groups like Telco.</li> </ul>
<b>membership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisations agree to the aims and pay a fee to become a member of the coalition.</li> <li>• Members are organisations rather than individuals; there are currently about 30 member organisations (including churches, mosques, community organisations, student groups and trade unions), all actively engaged in local issues in east London.</li> </ul>
<b>focus of representation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The focus is much wider than the delivery of services or local authority structures.</li> <li>• It aims to target public, private or voluntary sector organisations on issues of concern to the membership, for example refugee rights or low wage levels.</li> </ul>
<b>key activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A range of actions may be undertaken depending on the current campaigns; these might include gathering evidence, lobbying, organising protests and mass actions.</li> <li>• A high priority is given to professional training for people involved in any given campaign.</li> </ul>

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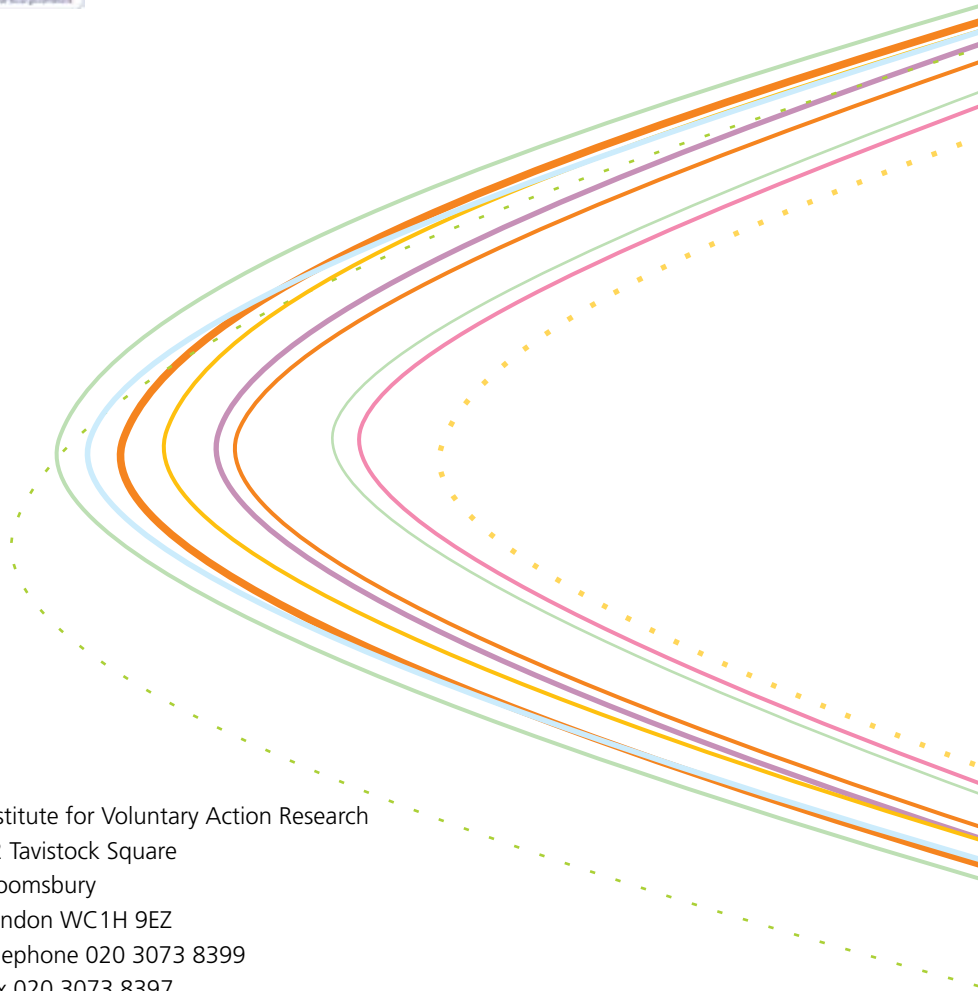
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**for further information, please contact:**

Improvement and Development Agency  
Layden House  
76–86 Turnmill Street  
London EC1M 5LG  
telephone 020 7296 6600  
fax 020 7296 6666  
email [info@idea.gov.uk](mailto:info@idea.gov.uk)  
[www.idea.gov.uk](http://www.idea.gov.uk)

Institute for Voluntary Action Research  
32 Tavistock Square  
Bloomsbury  
London WC1H 9EZ  
telephone 020 3073 8399  
fax 020 3073 8397  
email: [enquires@ivar.org.uk](mailto:enquires@ivar.org.uk)  
[www.ivar.org.uk](http://www.ivar.org.uk)

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